

X-FACTOR[®]

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PABLO H. REBER
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DIRECT EDITION

IN A SOCIETY WHERE MUTANTS AND FORMER MUTANTS ALIKE FEEL THREATENED BY THE WORLD AROUND THEM, THEY TURN TO THEIR FIRST, BEST LINE OF DEFENSE WHENEVER TROUBLE ARISES: X-FACTOR, THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY FOUNDED BY MADROX, THE MULTIPLE MAN.

X-FACTOR

WHAT'S HAPPENED UP UNTIL NOW



JAMIE MADROX IS ON A MINI-ODYSSEY; "GATHERING IN" WAYWARD DUPES SO THAT HE CAN LITERALLY GET HIMSELF TOGETHER.

THERESA AND MONET HAVE JUST HAD A TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE IN FRANCE, WITH THE RESULT BEING THAT THEY HAVE FLED THE COUNTRY. BUT THEY'RE RETURNING WITH A RATHER UNIQUE SOUVENIR: A YOUNG FRENCH ORPHAN AND FORMER MUTANT NAMED NICOLE.

GUIDO, RICTOR, RAHNE AND LAYLA HAVE BEEN M.I.A. FOR TWO ISSUES, BUT THAT'S ABOUT TO BE RECTIFIED.

PETER'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER, CAROLINE, JUST CELEBRATED HER FOURTH BIRTHDAY PARTY. SHE'S STILL A LITTLE SHAKY ON THE WHOLE AGE THING: WHEN SOMEONE ASKS HER HOW OLD SHE IS, SHE RESPONDS CHEERFULLY, "CAROLINE!", GIVING THE WHOLE THING A SORT OF SOUTH PARK "TIMMY!" VIBE.

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WASHINGTON, D.C., LAST CHRISTMAS.

YOU
REALLY
OVERDID
IT, DAD.

SHE'S MY ONLY
GRANDDAUGHTER.
IT'S MY RIGHT TO
SPOIL HER
ROTTEN.

AND I, BEING
HER MOTHER,
GET NO SAY IN
THE MATTER?

THAT'S RIGHT,
BECAUSE I, BEING
YOUR FATHER--NOT TO
MENTION UNDERSECRETARY
OF DEFENSE--OUTRANK
YOU ON EVERY
LEVEL.

WHERE'S THAT
NO-GOOD, LAZY
HUSBAND OF
YOURS?

STILL ASLEEP
UPSTAIRS, DAD. MAYBE
YOU FORGOT, BUT IT'S,
LIKE, SIX IN THE
MORNING.

A WALKING
PRETTY PONY!
OH, BOY!

AND HE WAS
UP UNTIL TWO A.M.
WRAPPING PRESENTS,
SO GIVE HIM A
BREAK, OKAY?

WRAPPING...? WHAT, YOU MEAN
SANTA DIDN'T JUST DROP EVERYTHING
OFF FULLY WRAPPED? THE ELVES
ARE SLACKING.

HA. HA.

YOU WANT
ME TO WHIP UP
SOME OF MY
FAMOUS
OMELETS?

THAT
WOULD BE
GREAT.

AND HONEY...I DO
APPRECIATE YOU AND
YOUR HUSBAND, THE
COP...WHAT'S HIS
NAME--

STEVE.

--COMING
DOWN FOR THE
HOLIDAYS. KIND
OF QUIET AROUND
HERE SINCE YOUR
MOM PASSED
AWAY.

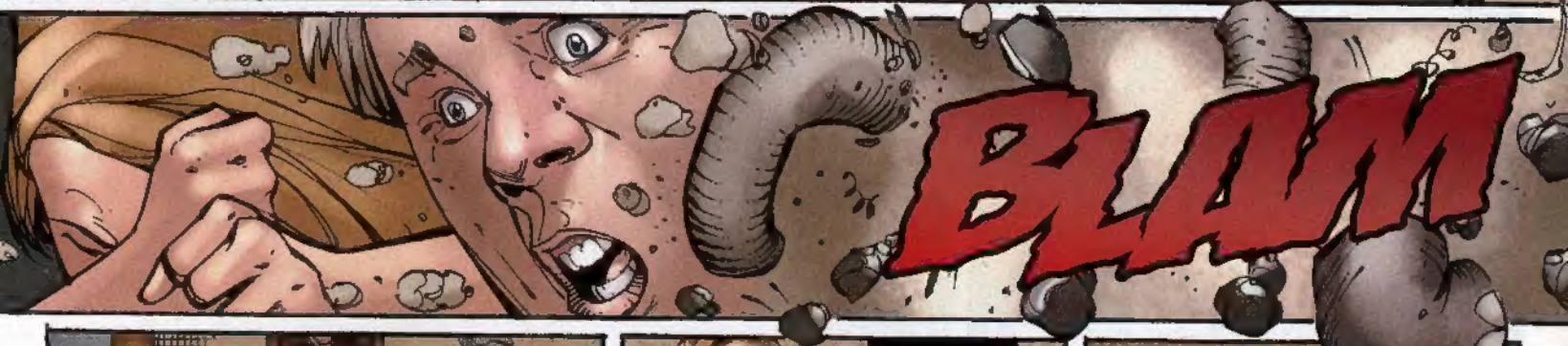
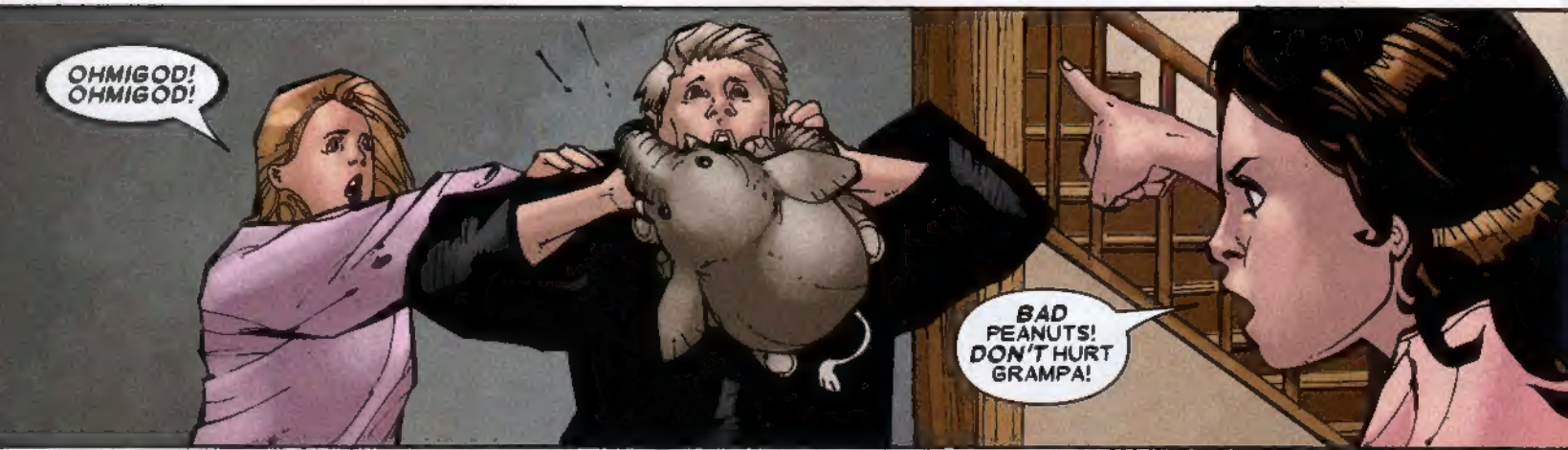
I KNOW,
DAD. I
KNOW.

A BABY
ELEPHANT! HE'S
BEAUTIFUL!

HMM?

I DON'T
REMEMBER
GETTING HER A
TOY ELEPHANT.





⊗ DETROIT. NOW.



KNEW
YOU'D BE
SHOWING
UP.

YEAH?
HOW'D
YOU KNOW
THAT?

BECAUSE I,
MY FRIEND, AM
THE WORLD'S
GREATEST
DETECTIVE.



I THOUGHT
THAT WAS
BATMAN.

NOPE. ME.
FOR STARTERS, I
DON'T GET OFF ON
HAVING SOME KID IN
GREEN SHORTS
FOLLOWING ME
AROUND. WHAT'S UP
WITH THAT?

COULDN'T
SAY.

LOOK, HOW
ABOUT WE GO GET
SOME COFFEE...



SO YOU
CAN SOBER
ME UP?

YOU DON'T
WANT TO ABSORB
ME WHILE I'M
DRUNK, BECAUSE
THEN YOU'LL BE
HAMMERED.

YOU'RE
RIGHT.

I'M
ALWAYS
RIGHT.





WANT SOME?

NO THANKS. BAD THINGS TEND TO HAPPEN WHEN I DRINK.

LIKE SLEEPING WITH SOMEONE, OR SOMEONES, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE?



HOW DID YOU KNOW?

WHICH WORD WAS UNCLEAR? WORLD'S? GREATEST? OR DETECTIVE?

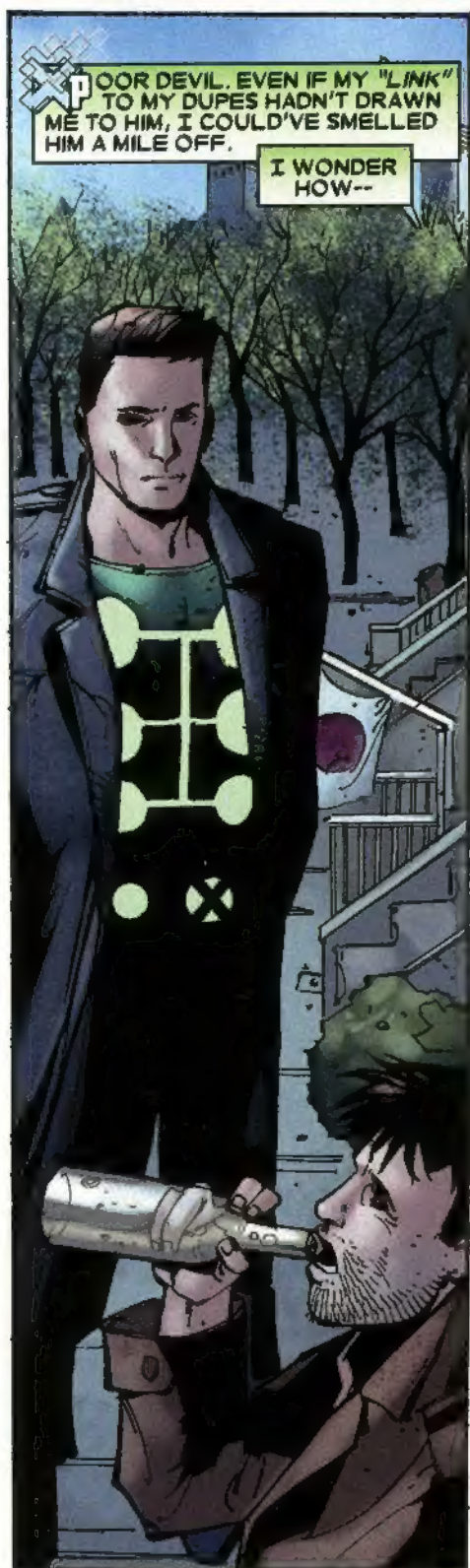
THAT'S WHAT YOU SENT ME OUT TO **BECOME**, AFTER ALL. AND I DID. CRAMMED A LIFETIME'S WORTH OF LEARNING INTO A FEW YEARS.

AND THEN YOU ABSORB ME AND GET ALL THE KNOWLEDGE. YOU BECOME, IN REALITY, THAT WHICH YOU'RE ONLY **PRETENDING TO BE**: A DETECTIVE.



THAT'S THE PLAN.

'CEPT HERE'S THE ONE THING YOU DIDN'T COUNT ON: THE KNOWLEDGE? **THIS** IS WHAT IT DOES TO YOU.



X POOR DEVIL. EVEN IF MY "LINK" TO MY DUPES HADN'T DRAWN ME TO HIM, I COULD'VE SMELLED HIM A MILE OFF.

I WONDER HOW--



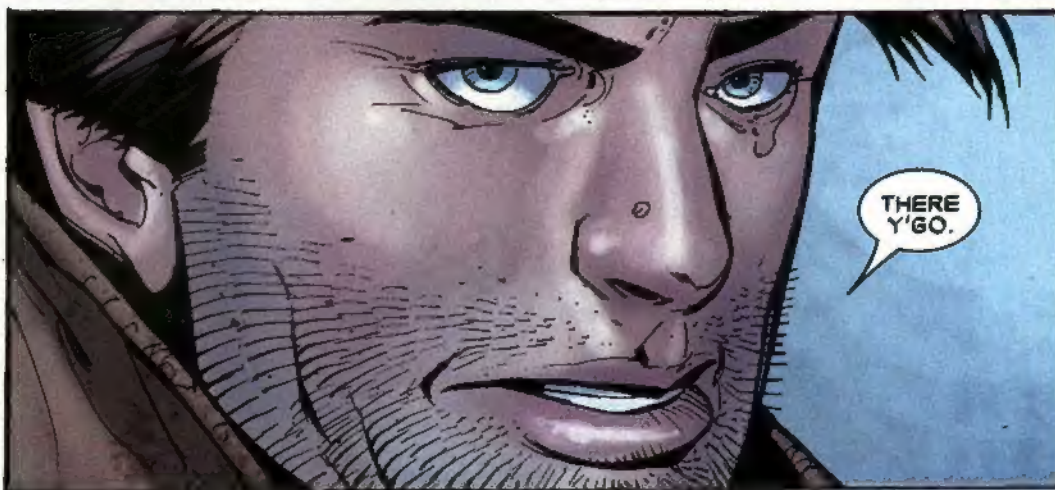
YOU'RE WONDERING HOW MASTERING THE ELEGANT ART OF INVESTIGATION COULD POSSIBLY REDUCE ME TO THIS, HUH?

THINK HARD. PUT IT TOGETHER.

I'LL WAIT.



IT'S NOT THE TECHNIQUES THEMSELVES. YOU **FOUND OUT SOMETHING**. SOMETHING SO UPSETTING THAT YOU'RE TRYING TO DRINK YOURSELF INTO OBLIVION.



THERE Y'GO.



I'VE BEEN CHASING LEADS...SEEING PATTERNS WHERE EVERYONE ELSE SEES ONLY CHAOS.

I KNOW WHAT'S COMING.

I KNOW ABOUT UBER.

I EVEN KNOW THE TRUE SOURCE OF YOUR POWERS.



UBER? WHAT'S...AND... MY POWERS? WHAT--?

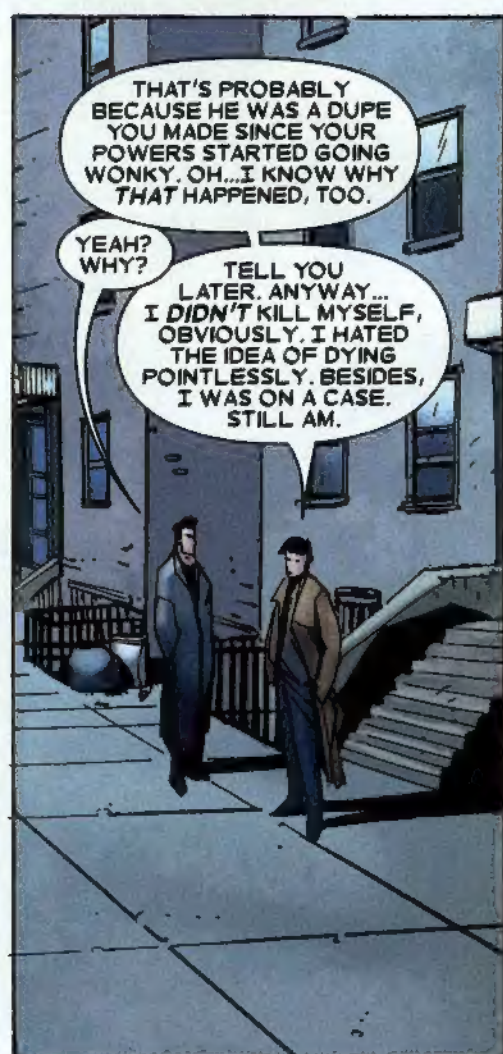
WHEN YOU ABSORB MY KNOWLEDGE, YOU'LL KNOW, TOO. BUT I DON'T WANT TO DO THAT TO YOU.



BECAUSE I LOVE YOU SO MUCH. THE THOUGHT OF YOU KNOWING WHAT I KNOW...

I SWEAR TO YOU...I THOUGHT ABOUT KILLING MYSELF SO YOU'D NEVER FIND OUT.

THAT WON'T WORK. A DUPE DIED NOT LONG AGO AND I GOT HIS KNOWLEDGE ANYWAY.



THAT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE HE WAS A DUPE YOU MADE SINCE YOUR POWERS STARTED GOING WONKY. OH...I KNOW WHY THAT HAPPENED, TOO.

YEAH? WHY?

TELL YOU LATER. ANYWAY... I DIDN'T KILL MYSELF, OBVIOUSLY. I HATED THE IDEA OF DYING POINTLESSLY. BESIDES, I WAS ON A CASE. STILL AM.



THE CAPTAIN OF THIS PRECINCT IS AS DIRTY AS THEY COME. WHEN A YOUNG UNIFORMED COP FOUND OUT ABOUT HIS MOB CONNECTIONS AND WAS ABOUT TO GO PUBLIC...

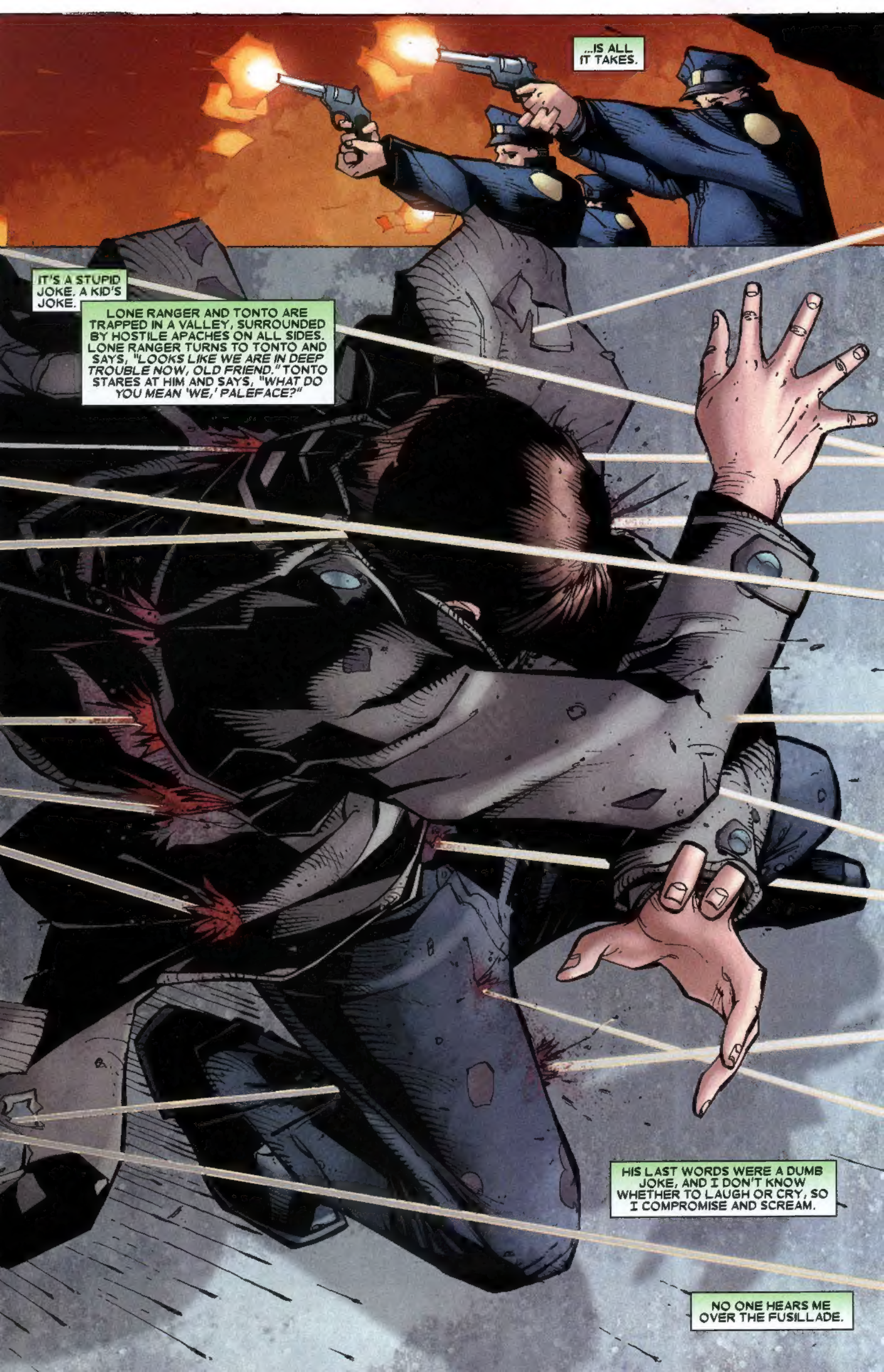
THE CAPTAIN HAD HIM KILLED...AND SMEARED THE YOUNG COP'S REPUTATION TO UNDERCUT ANY INVESTIGATION.

I SMELLED A RAT. WENT TO THE WIDOW. INVESTIGATED.

KNOW WHAT I FOUND? THE CAPTAIN HAD INSULATED HIMSELF TOO WELL.

I KNOW HE DID IT, BUT I CAN'T TOUCH HIM.





...IS ALL
IT TAKES.

IT'S A STUPID
JOKE. A KID'S
JOKE.

LONE RANGER AND TONTO ARE
TRAPPED IN A VALLEY, SURROUNDED
BY HOSTILE APACHES ON ALL SIDES.
LONE RANGER TURNS TO TONTO AND
SAYS, "LOOKS LIKE WE ARE IN DEEP
TROUBLE NOW, OLD FRIEND." TONTO
STARES AT HIM AND SAYS, "WHAT DO
YOU MEAN 'WE,' PALEFACE?"

HIS LAST WORDS WERE A DUMB
JOKE, AND I DON'T KNOW
WHETHER TO LAUGH OR CRY, SO
I COMPROMISE AND SCREAM.

NO ONE HEARS ME
OVER THE FUSILLADE.



THEY APPROACH HIM CAREFULLY, GUNS LEVELED. HE'S BLEEDING OUT OF ABOUT TWO DOZEN HOLES, HIS BRAINS ARE LEAKING ONTO THE SIDEWALK...

...AND THEY ACT LIKE HE'S STILL A THREAT. IT'S LUDICROUS.



I'D LAUGH IF I WASN'T CRYING LIKE A LITTLE GIRL.

HE KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN. HE WANTED IT TO.

IF HE'D JUST WANTED TO ICE THE CAPTAIN, HE WAS SMART ENOUGH TO DO IT WITHOUT GETTING CAUGHT.



WHICH MEANS...WHAT? THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO LIVE WITH BEING A MURDERER?

OR, MORE LIKELY, HE JUST FIGURED IT WAS A CHANCE TO KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE: ONE BIRD BEING THE DIRTY COP...

...THE OTHER BEING HIMSELF.



OH GOD. HOW IN THE--

**BREEEP
BREEEP
BREEEP**



GREAT.

WHAT IS IT?



JAMIE? IT'S LAYLA.



ARE YOU OKAY? YOU SOUND LIKE YOU'RE CRYING.

DON'T YOU ALREADY KNOW? I MEAN, THAT'S YOUR THING, RIGHT? YOU KNOW STUFF.



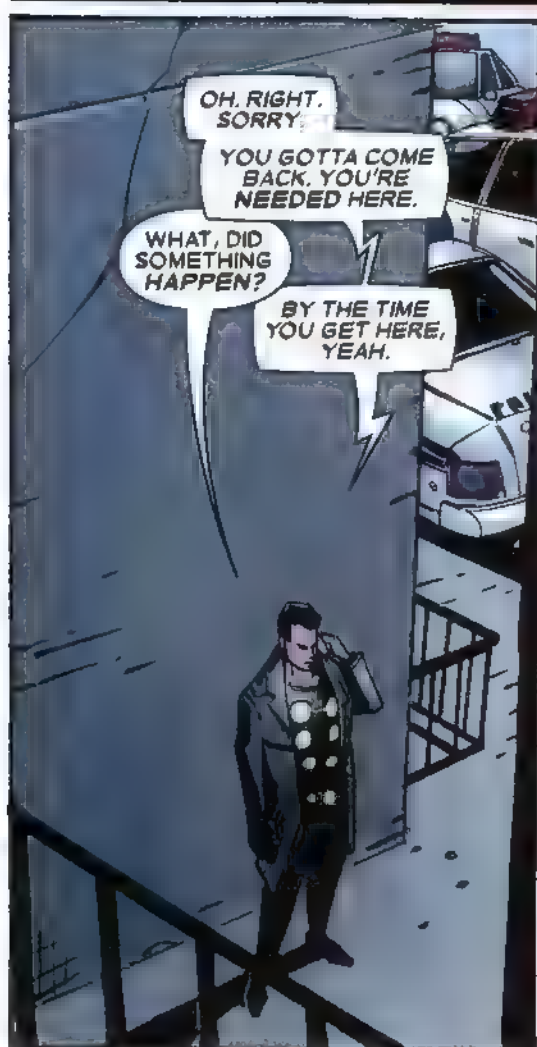
RIGHT, JUST STUFF. EVERYBODY KNOWS STUFF. I JUST KNOW STUFF THAT OTHER PEOPLE DON'T.

BUT I DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING. IF I DID, I'D BE ALL, "HI, I'M LAYLA MILLER. I KNOW EVERYTHING."



OR I COULD JUST SAY, "HI, I'M LAYLA MILLER. I'M OMNISCIENT." THAT'S LESS WORDS, WHICH IS--

LAYLA, TELL ME WHY THE HELL YOU'RE CALLING OR I'M HANGING UP.



OH, RIGHT. SORRY.

YOU GOTTA COME BACK. YOU'RE NEEDED HERE.

WHAT, DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?

BY THE TIME YOU GET HERE, YEAH.



Y'KNOW, YOU'RE REALLY FRAYING MY NERVES, LAYLA.

YOU'LL GET USED TO IT. A PLANE TICKET HOME IS WAITING FOR YOU AT THE DETROIT METRO AIRPORT.

AND YOU KNOW I'M IN DETROIT BECAUSE "YOU KNOW STUFF."



I KNOW IT BECAUSE YOU HAVE A LOCATOR BEACON IN YOUR COM DEVICE.

OH, RIGHT.

DOOFUS.

MLW

MUTANT TOWN...

HEY!
RAHNE! WAIT
UP!

WHAT, YOU'RE
PRETENDING YOU
DIDN'T HEAR ME?

EVEN WHEN
I'M IN HUMAN FORM,
I STILL HAVE WOLF-
LEVEL HEARING,
RICTOR.

YEAH?
SINCE
WHEN?

SINCE
RECENTLY, AND I
DINNA WANNA TALK
ABOUT IT.

WHAT DO
YE WANT?

YOU JUST
SEEM KIND OF OUT
OF IT LATELY. I
THOUGHT YOU MIGHT
LIKE TO TALK.

IF YE HAPPEN TO BE IN A CHATTY
MOOD, WHY NOT GO OFF WITH
YUR NEW BEST FRIEND...
QUICKSILVER.

WHAT'S
THAT SUPPOSED
TO MEAN?

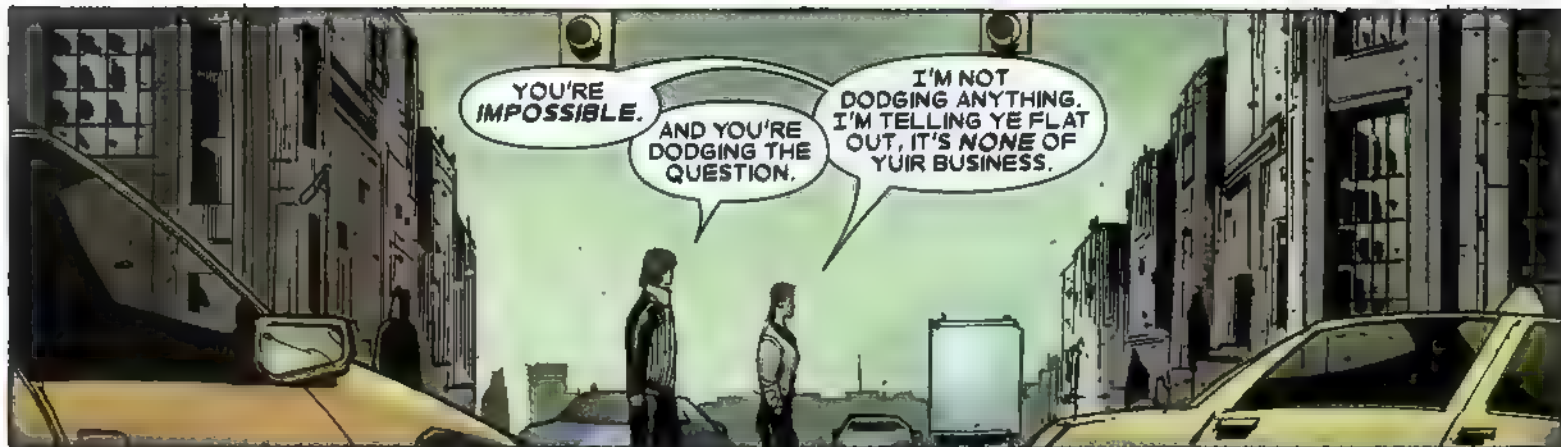
IN CASE
YE HAVEN'T
NOTICED,
PIETRO IS
EVIL.

THERE'S
PLENTY OF PEOPLE
WHO THINK WE'RE EVIL.
APPEARANCES CAN
BE DECEIVING.

PEOPLE
SAY THAT A LOT.
FUNNY THING...

NINETY-NINE
PERCENT OF THE
TIME, THINGS ARE
EXACTLY WHAT
THEY APPEAR
TO BE.

YEAH? WELL
EIGHTY-FIVE PERCENT
OF ALL STATISTICS ARE
MADE UP, SO THERE.



YOU'RE IMPOSSIBLE.

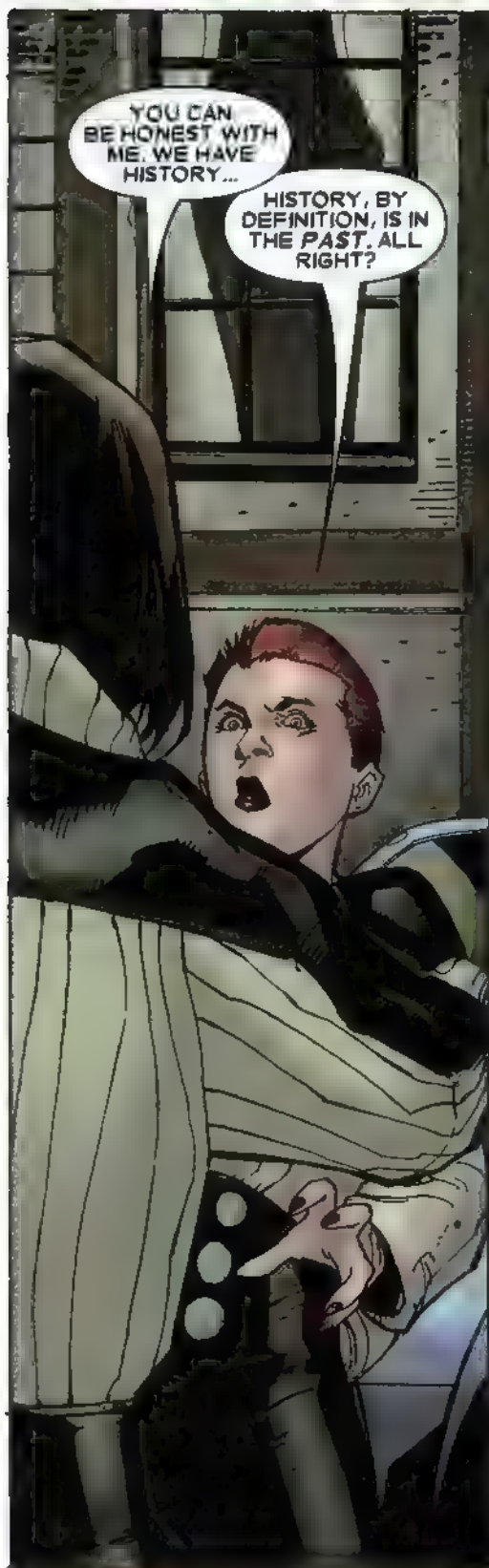
AND YOU'RE DODGING THE QUESTION.

I'M NOT DODGING ANYTHING. I'M TELLING YE FLAT OUT, IT'S NONE OF YUIR BUSINESS.



RAHNE, COME ON...

LET GO, RICTOR.

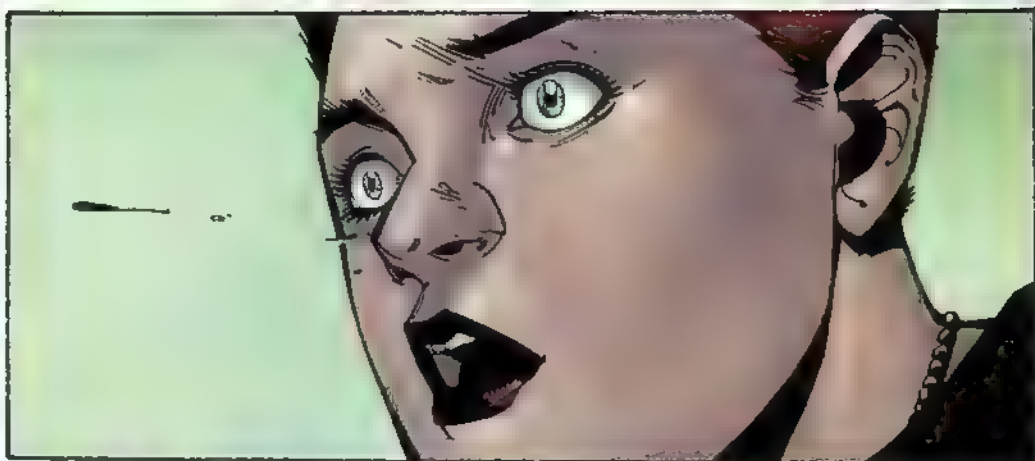


YOU CAN BE HONEST WITH ME. WE HAVE HISTORY...

HISTORY, BY DEFINITION, IS IN THE PAST. ALL RIGHT?

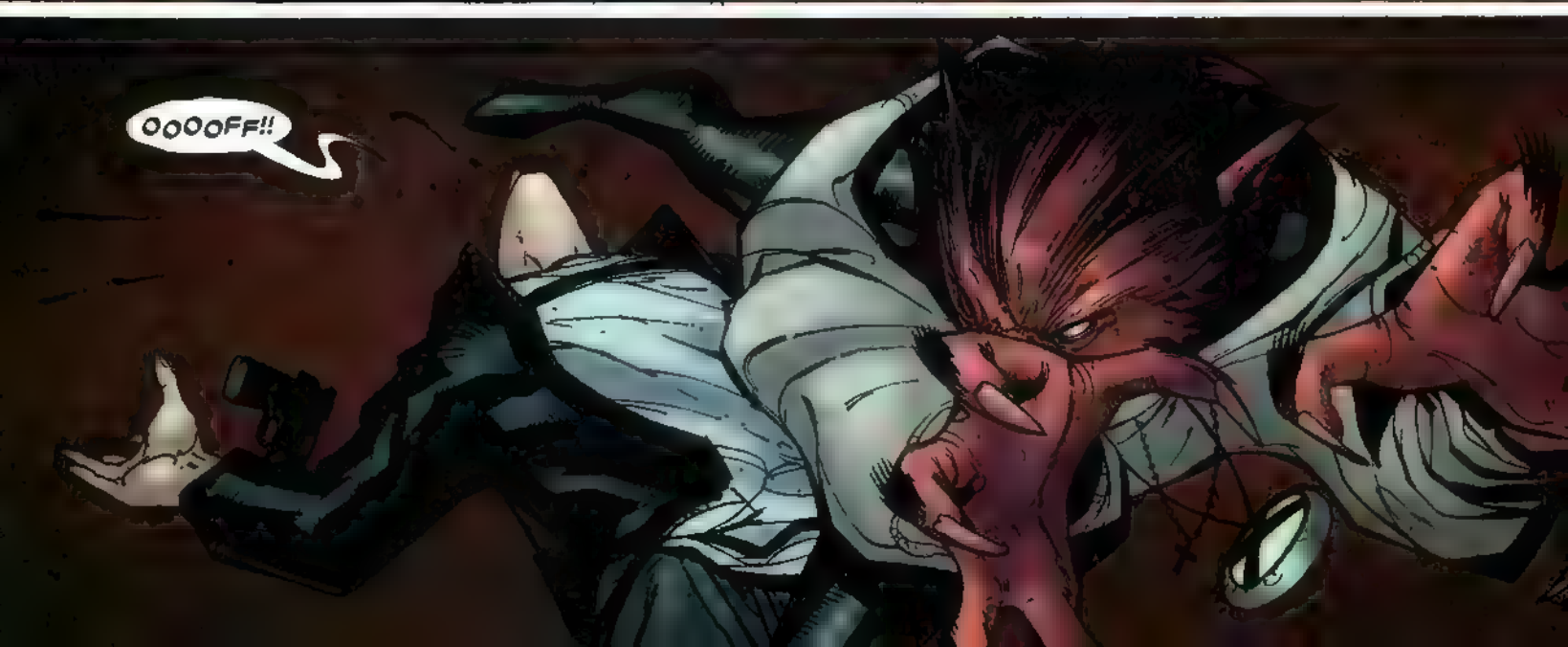


WHAT, ARE YOU UPSET BECAUSE MADROX DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE GOOD ENOUGH TO SLEEP WITH?



I'M... AW MAN, RAHNE, I'M... I DIDN'T...







MARTELLI!!

EEERRRR!!!

GET AWAY FROM HIM, YOU FREAK--! WE'RE--!



HEY!!!!

SORRY, FELLA. AROUND THESE PARTS, "FREAK" IS THE "F" WORD.



UNFFFF!!!



I DINNA NEED YUIR HELP!

LOOK, I'M SORRY ABOUT THE CRACK BEFORE, OKAY?

SAVE YUIR SORRY!



WHERE'D THE WEE BOY GO? THE ONE THEY WERE MUGGING?

HE LIT OUT OF HERE, DOWN THE FAR END.



HE'S PROBABLY TERRIFIED, THE POOR...

AW, CRAP.

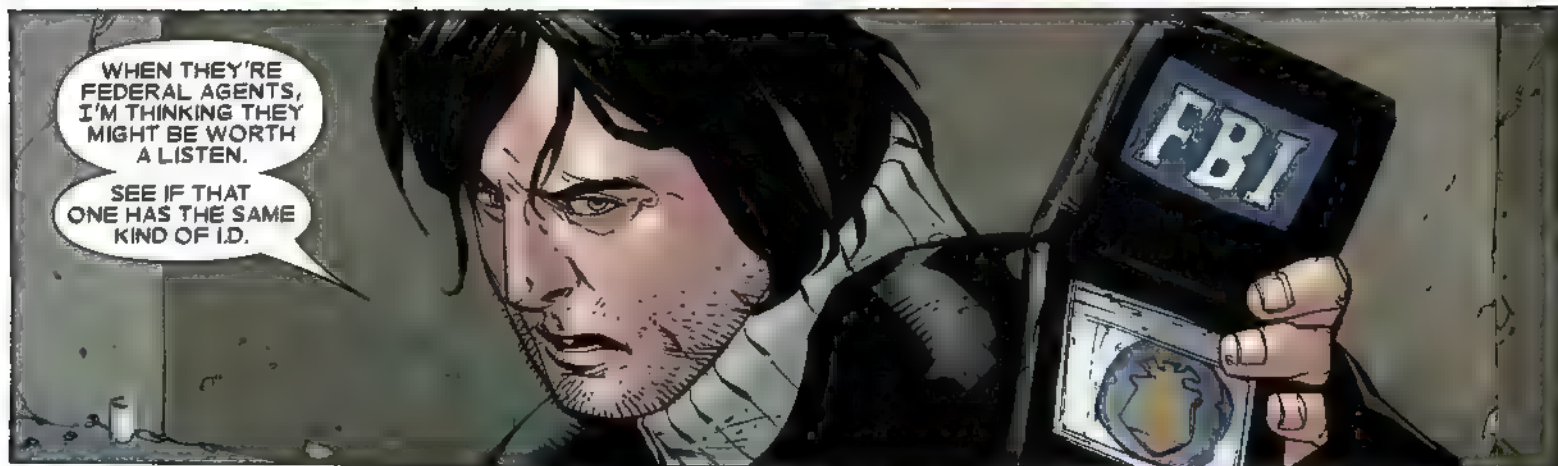


CRAP CRAP CRAPPITY CRAP.

WHAT IS IT NOW?

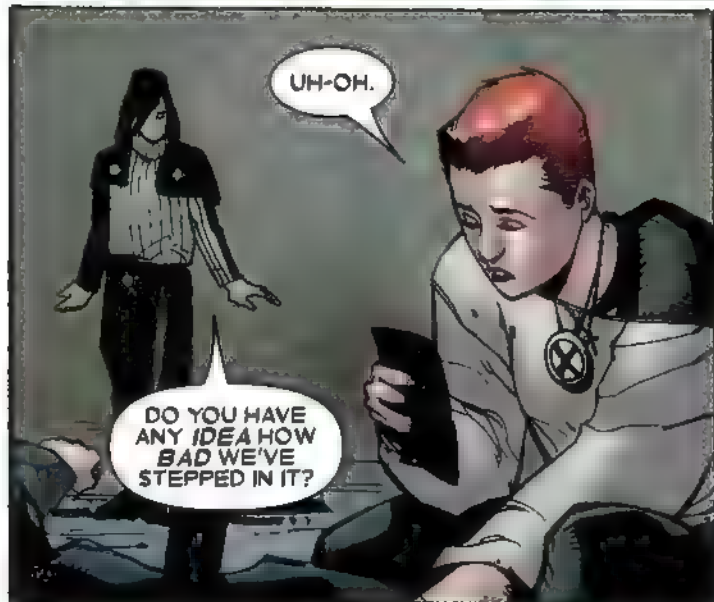
YOU KNOW HOW WE KIND OF PUNCHED THEM AND KICKED THEM WHILE THEY WERE IN MID-SENTENCE, SO THEY NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO FINISH WHAT THEY WERE SAYING?

SO? WHO GIVES A DAMN WHAT MUGGERS HAVE TO SAY?



WHEN THEY'RE FEDERAL AGENTS, I'M THINKING THEY MIGHT BE WORTH A LISTEN.

SEE IF THAT ONE HAS THE SAME KIND OF I.D.



UH-OH.

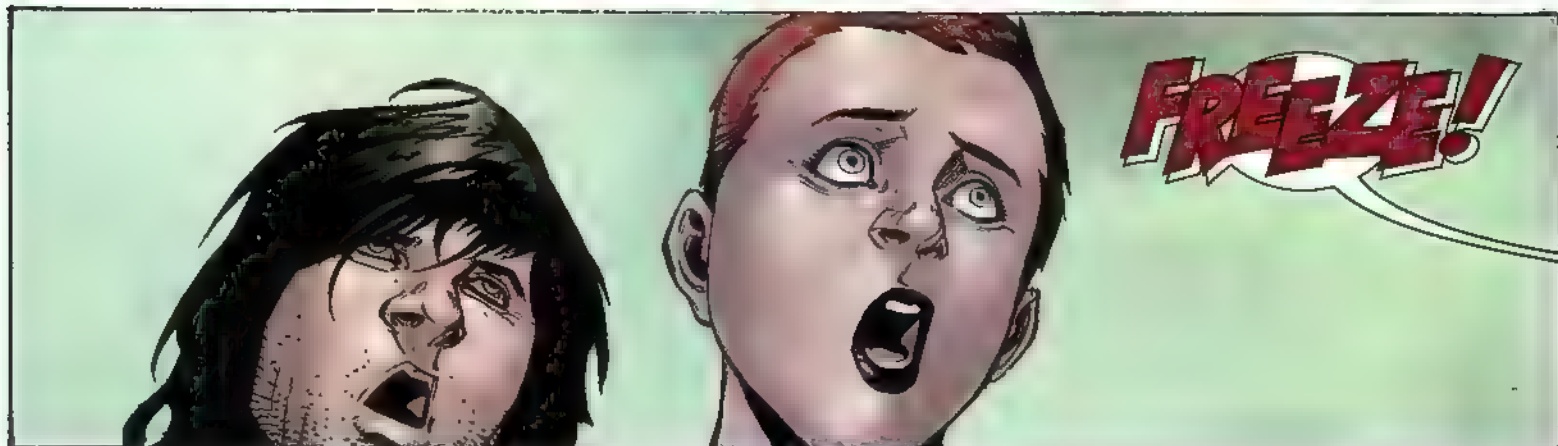
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW BAD WE'VE STEPPED IN IT?



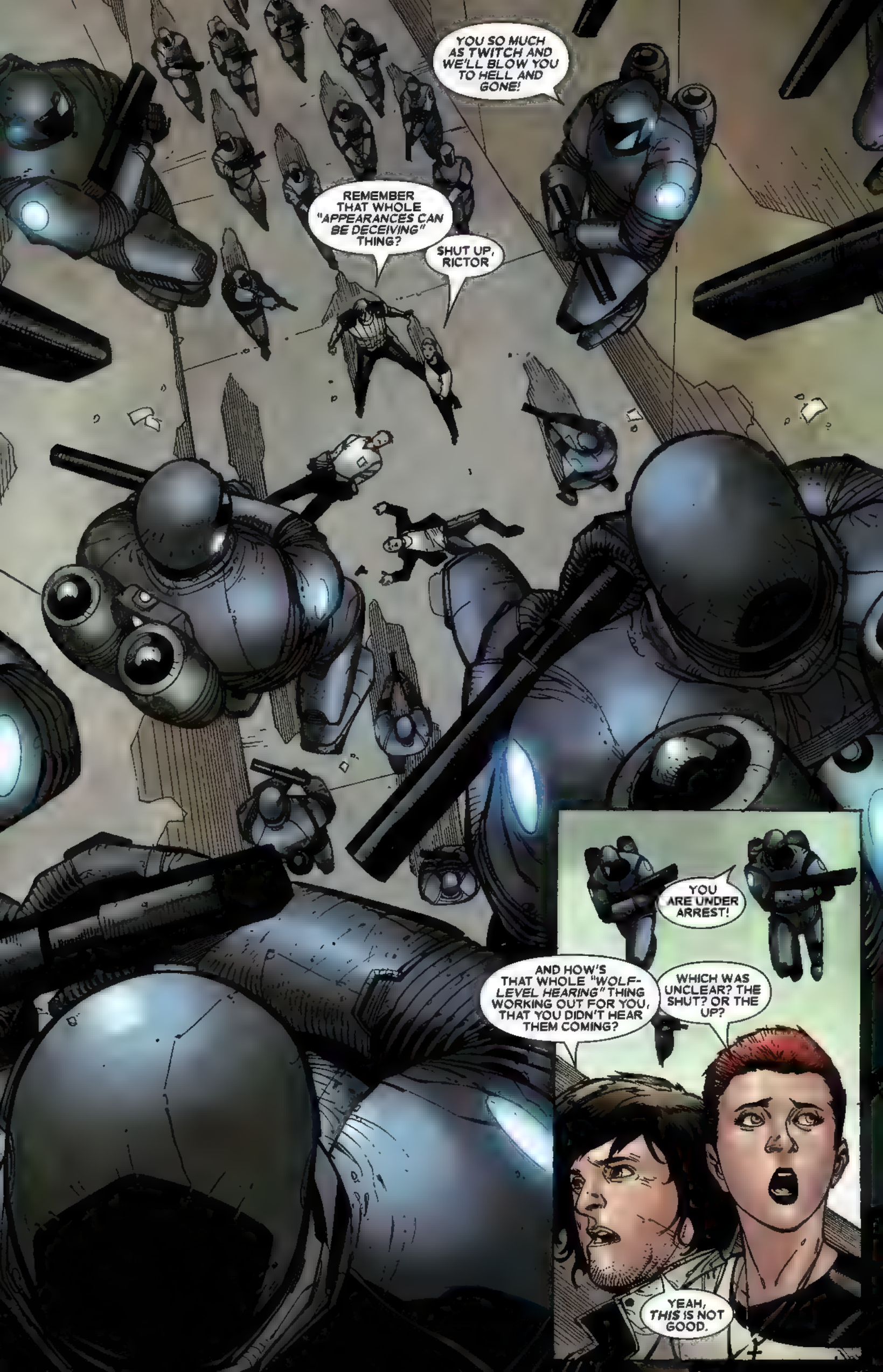
MAY-MAYBE THEY'RE FAKE.

WHY? SO THEY COULD BUY DRINKS AT THE LOCAL FEDERAL AGENT BAR?

LOOK...LET'S JUST GET OUT OF HERE AND BE THANKFUL THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANYONE ACTING AS BACKUP FOR--



FREEZE!!



YOU SO MUCH
AS TWITCH AND
WE'LL BLOW YOU
TO HELL AND
GONE!

REMEMBER
THAT WHOLE
"APPEARANCES CAN
BE DECEIVING"
THING?

SHUT UP,
RICTOR



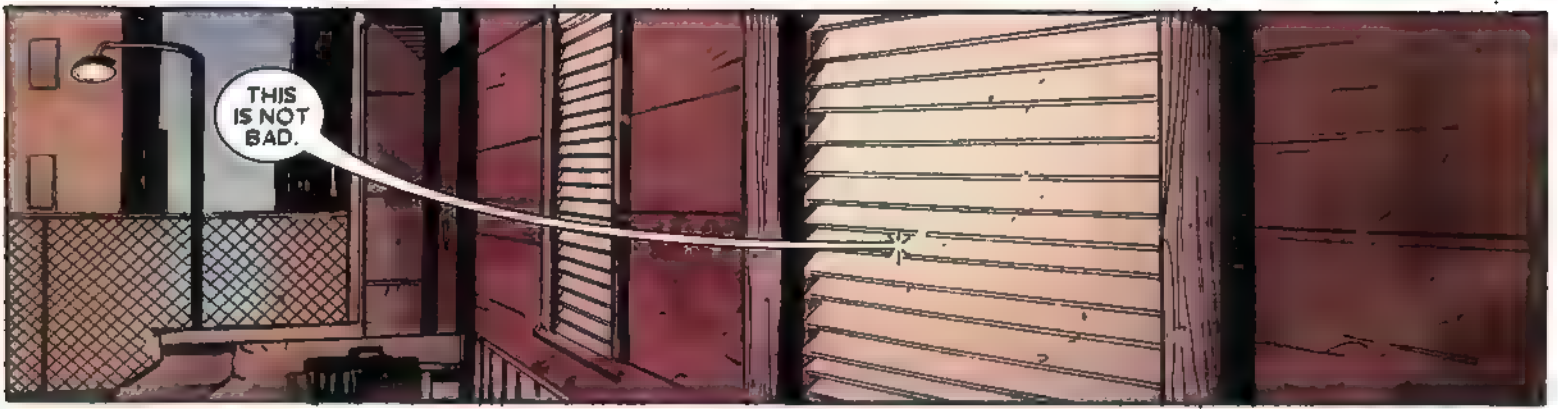
YOU
ARE UNDER
ARREST!

AND HOW'S
THAT WHOLE "WOLF-
LEVEL HEARING" THING
WORKING OUT FOR YOU,
THAT YOU DIDN'T HEAR
THEM COMING?

WHICH WAS
UNCLEAR? THE
SHUT? OR THE
UP?



YEAH,
THIS IS NOT
GOOD.

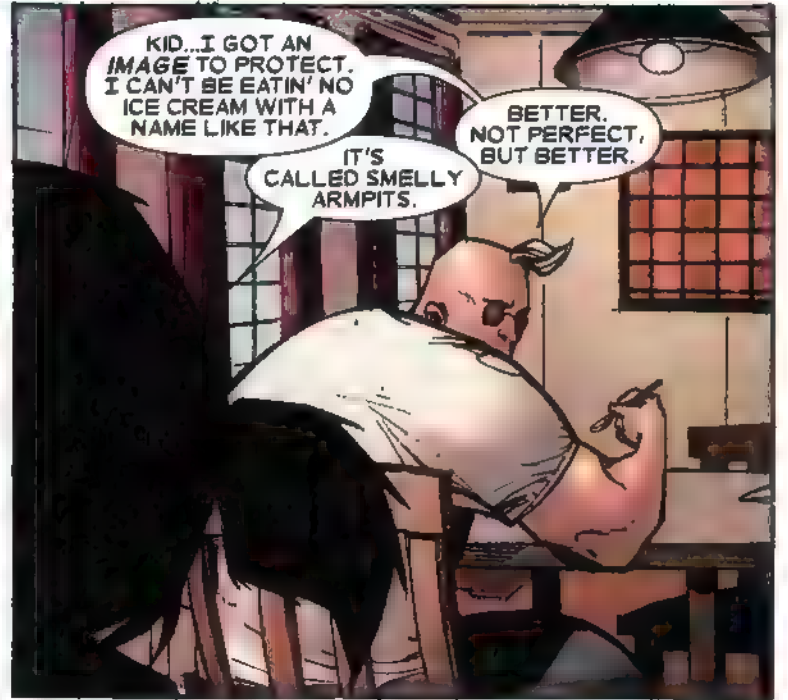


THIS IS NOT BAD.



WHAT FLAVOR OF ICE CREAM IS THIS?

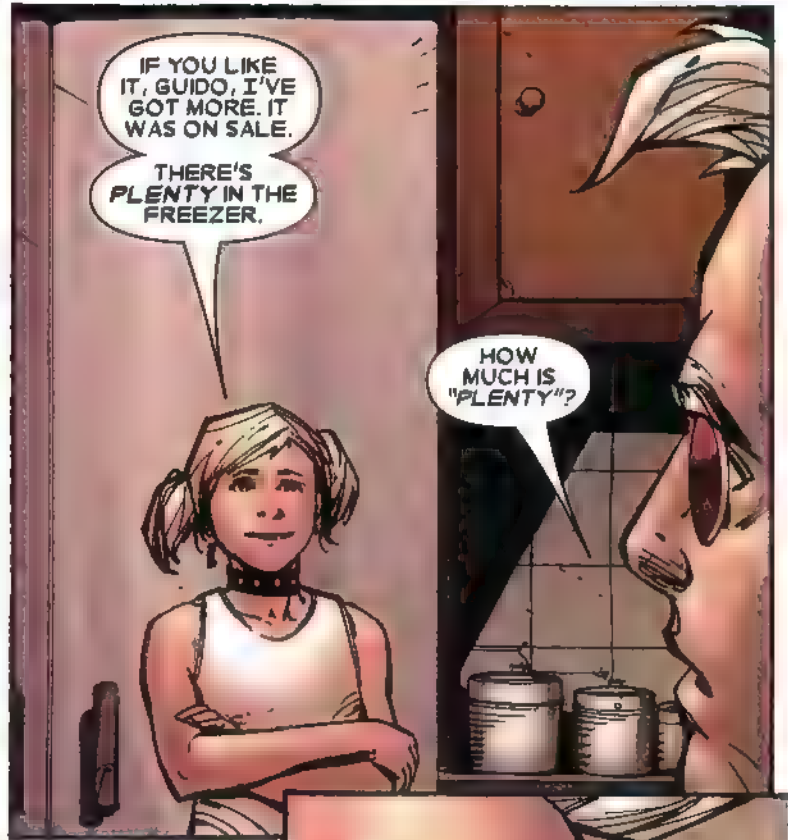
IT'S CALLED ROOTY TOOTY FRESH AND FRUITY.



KID...I GOT AN IMAGE TO PROTECT. I CAN'T BE EATIN' NO ICE CREAM WITH A NAME LIKE THAT.

BETTER. NOT PERFECT, BUT BETTER.

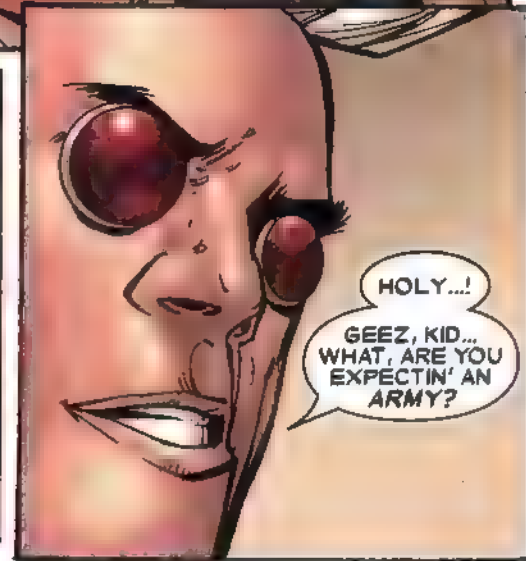
IT'S CALLED SMELLY ARMPITS.



IF YOU LIKE IT, GUIDO, I'VE GOT MORE. IT WAS ON SALE.

THERE'S PLENTY IN THE FREEZER.

HOW MUCH IS "PLENTY"?



HOLY...!
GEEZ, KID...
WHAT, ARE YOU
EXPECTIN' AN
ARMY?

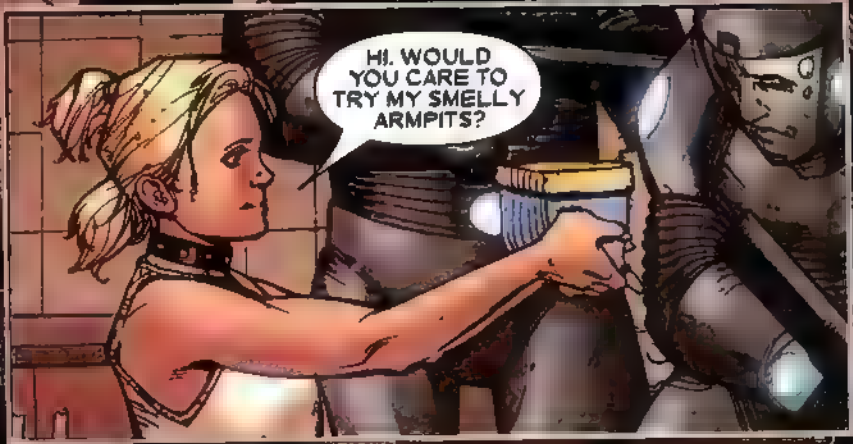


HUNH?!?!



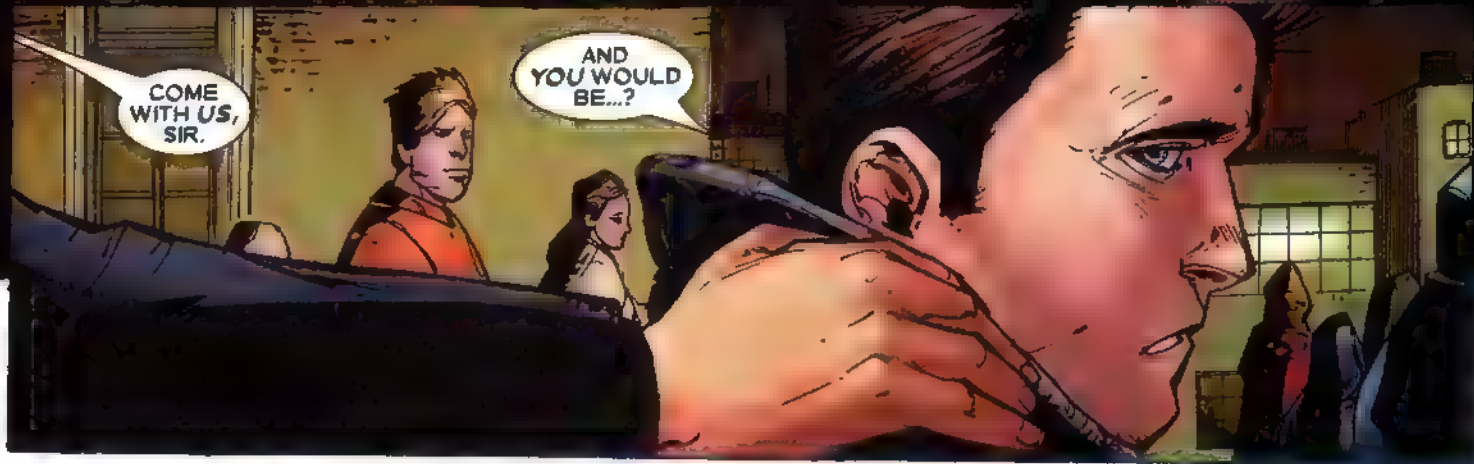
WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON?!?

DON'T MOVE!
YOU'RE UNDER
SUSPICION OF WORKING
WITH TERRORISTS TO
OVERTHROW THE
GOVERNMENT!



HI. WOULD YOU CARE TO TRY MY SMELLY ARMPITS?







I JUST WANT TO WARN YOU, IF YOU'RE ABOUT TO WHISK ME OFF TO THE OSCARS, WE NEED TO STOP AND PICK UP MY TUX.



AWWW NUTS! THEY TOLD ME IT WAS A LADY!



YOU'RE A RIOT, MADROX.

LOOKS TO ME LIKE THE REAL RIOT IS OUTSIDE.

SO WHAT'S VAL COOPER DOING MIXED UP IN THIS? THINGS GET TOO QUIET OVER AT THE OFFICE OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY?



I WISH.

EDWARD HUTCHINSON, THE UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE, WAS ALMOST KILLED LAST CHRISTMAS BY A TOY.

SO GO NUKE FAO SCHWARZ AND CALL IT A DAY. WHY ARE YOU HASSLING MUTANT TOWN AND, OH YES... ME?



THE ATTACK WAS MASTERMINDED BY A HOME-GROWN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION CALLED THE X-CELL.

APPARENTLY THEY'RE ALL FORMER MUTANTS. THEY'RE ATTACKING GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, REPRESENTATIVES, MOSTLY CONNECTED TO THE MILITARY...

WHAT'S THEIR BEEF?

THEY BELIEVE THE GOVERNMENT IS BEHIND THE DECIMATION.



YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING.

WHY NOT? WHEN AIDS FIRST HIT, SPECULATION WAS IT WAS COOKED UP IN A GOVERNMENT GERM WARFARE LAB. HELL, SOME PEOPLE STILL BELIEVE THAT.



WHO'S THIS GUY?

THE RINGLEADER. NAME'S ELIJAH CROSS.

THESE SPECS AREN'T A TYPO? HE'S THREE FOOT SIX?

YES. WE'RE SEARCHING FOR HIM.

TRY LOOKING DOWN.



ACTUALLY, WE HAD HIM. BUT TWO PEOPLE HELPED HIM GET AWAY. WE CAUGHT THEM, THOUGH.

THEN ASK THEM WHERE HE WENT.

WE TRIED, BUT MR. RICTOR AND MS. SINCLAIR CLAIM IGNORANCE.



OH YEAH. THIS DAY'S JUST GETTING BETTER AND BETTER.

YOU NEED TO DO SOMETHING FOR ME, MADROX.

DOES IT INVOLVE SAVING A CHEERLEADER?



"NO. IT INVOLVES FINDING ELIJAH AND BUSTING THE X-CELL PERMANENTLY. AND SINCE WE BELIEVE THEY'RE HIDING IN MUTANT TOWN...YOU'RE GOING TO HELP US. OR ELSE."



PLEASE... HELP ME, MISTER. YOU MAY BE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN.



HAPPY TO BE OF SERVICE. BUT... "MISTER?" PLEASE...

CALL ME "PIETRO."



X-FACTOR

Peter David here at X-Central. Here's some nifty news: Editor Andy Schmidt and his lovely wife, Alix (for whom Alix Buchanan was named) are expecting their very first offspring. Personally, I was praying for twins or even triplets so they could be dressed in matching Multiple Man shirts, but sadly, no, just one is on the horizon. Still...anyone who agrees with me that the child should be Marvel-ously attired is welcome to send in little Madrox shirts in infant sizes and we'll make sure to run a picture of the baby sporting one of them.

"X-Factor"
Marvel Comics
417 5th Ave.
New York, NY 10016

As always, letters are edited for length but not content. Onward...

Dear X-Gang:

I've got an issue with the moral implications of Jamie's powers, brought to a head by his actions in the latest issue I've read, where he re-absorbs Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. Jamie against his will. Back in the day, Jamie's dupes were obedient happy projections, perfectly content to be "called home." But now every dupe is a potential "person," able to live and love and dream and die. No wonder he's become, in medical terms, screwed up. Every time he looks in the mirror, he sees a face that he's seen looking back at his in terror, not wanting to die. You wrote that he could still hear "Agent Madrox" screaming in his mind, but that they always stop after a while, which just adds to the lovely angst-stew that's brewing here, since it makes it clear that he's done this before, and is putting off the moral

implications, which never ends well...

I love the humor and the characterization in this book, but at times, it seems like the team is spending a bit too much time fighting their personal demons, while letting the world around them go to hell. And so Monet's "political statement" felt like a slap of cold water, and a step in the right direction. Proactive is good.

Ian Turner
(Via E-Mail)

Sorry we had to edit the living heck out of your letter, Ian. It would have required five lettercols dedicated just to you to run the whole thing, but we wanted to give at least an excerpt of such a well thought out missive. As you've seen, and will continue to see, we're not shying away from the moral ramifications of Jamie's powers. And as the current storyline is making clear, there's plenty of real world demons for our heroes to battle, and they're not hesitant to do so.

Dear X-FACTOR,

For me, the first 13 issues of X-FACTOR are just an introduction to the characters. The real fun part has only just begun. Keep up the good work and don't let success get into your heads. As for those who said X-FACTOR was just a second-rate comic book with second-rate characters, I beg to differ. In my opinion, it's first rate all the way and it's the characters and the story that makes it first rate.

Michael Edillor
Vancouver, British Columbia,
Canada

I swear, Michael, I could have filled three lettercols with nothing but letters from fans swearing up one side and down the other that we are anything but a second-rate effort. Pretty much everybody took that previous lettercol in the tongue-in-cheek spirit that it was intended, but nevertheless it was gratifying to see that outpouring of support.

Still...if you guys really want to help out...do what you can to introduce your fellow X-fans to our humble efforts. I still haven't given up my dream of this being the highest selling X-title. Can't do it without you guys. Just imagine if sales doubled practically overnight due to concerted efforts of X-FACTOR readers. No book's ever managed a jump like that, ever. But this is X-FACTOR, where the Un-X-pected always happens. So anything's possible.

-PAD

NEXT ISSUE:



"X-Cell" begins!

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